



# Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs

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*Legacy and Lessons Learned 2005 – 2012*

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## ***Introduction from John Lee...***

I remember vividly the evening of January 17, 1991. I was on my way home from work and heard the announcement on the radio that American forces had launched an attack on the city of Kuwait.

I had not felt this way since Vietnam. The unexplainable emotions about life, death, and the potential for casualties conjured up a sense of helplessness as I listened to the reporter and again heard the sounds of war.

I had joined the WDVA team in 1990 and agency leaders had been talking about the possibility of an attack on Kuwait for months, but I still wasn't ready for it.

Our agency however, was ready. Our leaders had been planning with Fort Lewis and the federal VA for several months and while the emotional shock of war was real, we had prepared as best we could to deal with the inevitable.

Fortunately, the inevitable never happened... the war lasted only days and the casualties were few. Thank God for that.

In 2003 after we had launched military operations in Afghanistan and war with Iraq was eminent, the emotions and thoughts about the planning and preparation we did twelve years previous, were relevant once more.

Like everyone else, I had no idea what awaited... the depth and breadth of WDVA's increased involvement, nor the impact that the Guard and Reserve components call to active duty would play.

I am proud that our state rallied to the cause. Governor Gregoire, our elected officials, and a literal "sea of good will" became pervasive in Washington State. Unlike what happened when my generation returned from Vietnam, our state joined together at all levels to make sure we got it right this time.

## ***If you Build it, They will Come...***

When our first conversation with people often starts with, “I didn’t know there was a *State* Department of Veterans Affairs, I thought that was the Federal VA’s job,” it reinforces that outreach and education are two of our biggest hurdles.

Add to that the fact that the Federal VA is sometimes thought of as a massive bureaucracy to be avoided rather than to be trusted, and you can begin to understand why just because you build it, doesn’t mean they will come!

As leaders in the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), we set out at the beginning of the Gregoire Administration to build Washington’s veterans trust in *their* Department of Veterans Affairs.

Our agency mission has long been “Serving Those Who Served”. But in order to do that, we needed to better instill a sense of trust and confidence within the veterans community and general population. When John Lee was appointed director in 2005, he set about to redefine a vision focused on trust.

### WDVA VISION STATEMENT

We *Trust* our military to protect our freedoms.  
Our military veterans and their families can *Trust* their Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs to:

- *Serve* as their advocate for all VA entitlements;
- Help *Heal* their seen and unseen wounds of war;
- Give *Help* to the homeless;
- Provide quality *Care* in our Veterans Homes; and
- *Honor* veterans in their final resting place.

Our *Commitment* is to always be worthy of that trust.

In order to provide service to the 670,000 veterans in our state, we relied on our Veterans Services Network to ensure we had advocates available for as many veterans and families as possible.

What began with enlisting the support of Veterans Service Organizations, such as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled American Veterans, just to name a few, expanded to enlisting the support of other non-profit organizations, state, federal and local agencies, and faith communities.

As leaders, we are convinced that the possibilities for partnership and collaboration are endless and that the formation of strategic alliances is the foundation to better serving our state’s veterans and their families.

## ***How Washington Kept Serving Those Who Served Throughout the Recession...***

For us, the timing of the Great Recession couldn't have been worse.

While we were putting together programs and services to help thousands of citizen soldiers face the challenges of multiple deployments, our state began the tough task of cutting budgets.

At the same time, countless business owners were laying off thousands of workers and closing their doors for good, leaving many of our returning Guard and Reserve members without jobs.

Recession or not – we needed to take action to help our service members transition home.

We focused on helping veterans reach their *new normal*. Some could pick up where they left off, get reconnected to their jobs, start school and rekindle family relationships. Others needed help with mental health counseling, medical conditions, homelessness, filing claims for VA disability compensation and unemployment insurance.

We also took a hard look at how we could get, and spend, what we fondly refer to as O.P.M. or other people's money.

As a result, our total budget actually grew during the recession, but it was because of the hard work and diligence of our program managers and leaders who looked for dollars anywhere they could find them.

We began contracts with counties, got grants from federal or local governments, and fostered alliances with non-profits. Nothing was off the table and all ideas were considered.

## *It takes a Village...*

As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began and our National Guard and Reserve troops were activated, we made a commitment that our state would be ready when they came home. In the words of John Lee and First Gentleman Mike Gregoire, we were going to *get it right* when these men and women returned.

But it was also a reality that no one agency could possibly provide all the help our veterans and their families would need.

So we joined forces with the Washington Military Department in 2005 and developed a Memorandum of Understanding to include eight state and federal agencies. The MOU spelled out how each of our agencies would work together to serve returning veterans.

In 2006, this MOU was expanded to include 32 partners from government agencies to non-profit organizations. This level of community involvement speaks volumes to how Washington State really came together to support our citizen soldiers.



From mobilization to homecoming, we prepared events to connect our National Guard and Reservists with the many benefits and services dedicated to helping them.

One of the challenges of serving National Guard and Reserve members is they aren't all located in one area. Unlike a Stryker Brigade returning to Joint Base Lewis McChord, these men and women return to their communities and are quite literally spread to the four corners of the state.

To reach our most rural communities, we held town hall meetings and brought local providers together to demonstrate how their resources would complement each other.

We knew that once home, it would be the community that came to the aid of their citizen soldiers so we helped prepare them to serve their own.

Our decision to reach out and be inclusive of any organization that wanted to help, whether it was public, private, faith based, or non-profit, has paid dividends when it comes to helping our service members transition back home.

## *The way it's always been done...*

Many of us at WDVA are veterans. We've been in the shoes of these young men and women and we know from experience what worked and what didn't. When it came to demobilizing, we knew the old process would lead to the same old results. Just look at some of our Vietnam brothers and sisters, who decades after the war are asking the VA for help for the first time.

The old way of out-processing was briefings and hundreds of PowerPoint slides. We wanted to actually *serve* Washington's veterans at their point of demobilization. We wanted to help them file a claim to the VA for disability compensation on the spot, sign them up for federal VA health care benefits, get them in touch with a readjustment counselor, sit them down with an employment specialist and if necessary sign them up for unemployment insurance – all before they got home.



So as part of our MOU, we took a team of state and federal employees and Veteran Service Organization contractors to Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, to serve members of Washington National Guard's 81<sup>st</sup> Brigade.

It took a few weeks, but we successfully touched each and every member of the brigade.



For those who had been injured on the battlefield or in the line of duty there is often a period of waiting in medical hold units. These are service members who in their current medical condition could not perform their military duties. Some would recover and return to their units, but others would eventually be separated due to their medical conditions.

We found that in many cases, these individuals would be separated without information on the programs and services available to them in the civilian world.

So, in 2005, we began a partnership at the Joint Base Lewis McChord Warrior Transition Battalion to provide seamless transition services to include benefits claims and counseling BEFORE the soldier was discharged. For veterans who would be separating and moving back to their home state, we developed a way to hand them off to their home state, ensuring that even if Washington was not their home, we'd connect them with people who could help.

## *When 'Welcome Home' isn't enough...*

Not since WWII had we seen such a large scale call-up of our National Guard and Reserve units. Thousands of citizen soldiers were called from their jobs and their families to serve on active duty as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq escalated.

For some the full-time employment was actually a good thing, it meant a steady paycheck and in some cases was more money than they had been making at civilian jobs.

But others realized their military pay was a fraction of what they brought home in their civilian job. Some also faced the reality that their one-person business was going to have to close its doors for over a year.



We had to do something to prepare for the financial struggles some of our National Guard and Reserve members would find themselves in. We knew, and our veterans community leadership knew, that asking the legislature for general-fund state dollars was a risky move, but in this situation, it simply had to be done.

Thanks to the Governor and the 2006 Legislature, \$2 million was set-aside in the Veterans Innovations Program. This program created a funding stream for grant and emergency assistance to veterans returning from Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan), Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq), and Operation Noble Eagle.

The program is unique to government. It offers us incredible flexibility to assess veterans and their families individually and tailor programs to get them back on their feet.

We believe that the most important benefit we can connect a veteran with is a job – so this program is focused on employment. Whether the veteran needs education, training, or a reliable vehicle to get back and forth to work, we can help tear down the barriers and keep moving forward.

By 2009, funding for this program began to run short. We were in danger of losing the program and asked the legislature for an infusion of general fund state dollars. We knew the \$500,000 we were blessed with was likely the last general fund state dollars we would receive for some time. So we started looking for other potential funding sources.

Gambling is always a controversial issue, as is tapping in to Lottery dollars, which are rightfully geared toward educating the next generation.

But we knew other states had some success in veteran scratch tickets, so we along with our veteran leaders approached the Lottery with that idea. While scratch wasn't a viable option, the Lottery thought a raffle might be.

At the start of the 2011 Legislative Session, we drafted a bill and successfully created the state's first Veterans Raffle, with all funds going directly to the Veterans Innovations Program.



**Governor Gregoire signs the law creating the Veterans Raffle.**

The first Raffle netted \$247,000 and has allowed us to keep the doors open to the Veterans Innovations Program.

We're eagerly awaiting the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Veterans Raffle on Veterans Day, 2012!



**VIP Recipient Ryan stands with Steve Largent at a Veterans Raffle kick-off event sponsored by the Seahawks**



## *The Art of Influence...*

There was good news in 2008 for thousands of separating military personnel. Congress took bold steps to improve the old Montgomery GI Bill. Once again it was a real benefit to veterans, it even included a living stipend and book allowance in addition to paying tuition at the highest in-state rate.

Our thoughts turned to our higher education institutions and we began wondering how prepared they would be to handle an influx of new students. How would they manage a classroom filled with 18 year old freshman students, that suddenly also had 2 or 3 war veterans as well?

This was an opportunity for our behavioral health program to train faculty and administrators in Veteran Cultural Competencies and in a matter of months they conducted trainings on campuses throughout the state.

We also developed a Memorandum of Understanding, signed by Governor Gregoire and several of her cabinet members, to encourage all schools to develop programs and services for their veteran students.

Once trainings were conducted and veteran best practices were in place, individual schools could sign on as Partners for Veteran Supportive Campuses.

But one area we couldn't, and really still haven't, cracked the code on is tracking the success of veterans in school.

We have thousands of young men and women with the opportunity to have their higher education paid for. In our opinion, we need to know who they are so we can help them be successful. Our ultimate goal is to help them become employed in our state's workforce.

Part of our difficulty is that we don't have any oversight in this area.

### **Partners for Veteran-Supportive Campuses**

Bellevue Community College  
Central Washington University  
Clover Park Technical College  
Eastern Washington University  
Edmonds Community College  
Green River Community College  
North Seattle Community College  
Olympic College  
Pacific Lutheran University  
Peninsula College  
Pierce College  
Seattle University  
Seattle Central Community College  
Shoreline Community College  
South Seattle Community College  
Spokane Community College  
Spokane Falls Community College  
The Evergreen State College  
University of Washington, Bothell  
University of Washington, Tacoma  
University of Washington, Seattle  
Washington State University, Tri Cities  
Washington State University, Vancouver  
Western Washington University

Realistically, our influence is only as strong as our power of persuasion!

So far, we haven't been able to develop a way for our higher education institutions to share information with us so that we can make a connection with veterans on campuses in Washington State.

We haven't given up.

This is an area that will continue to be of great concern, because it is so important. We're still talking to higher education officials, legislators and individual colleges and universities to see how we can help develop a way to ensure each veteran on a Washington campus achieves their goals.

## ***Working the Issue from the Ground Up...***

One way we have been able to connect with veterans on some campuses is through a newly created program called Vet Corps.

The Vet Corps actually stemmed from a WDVA program that was in danger of losing all its funding.

Back in 2006, our Veterans Conservation Corps had created an academy program where veterans could attend environmental training programs while receiving a monthly living stipend. With the advent of the new GI Bill, the program didn't receive continued funding.

So the Veterans Conservation Corps looked for ways it could continue to help veteran students once they got onto a campus. The Vet Corps was born from an AmeriCorps grant and today we embed 50 Vet Corps members on college campuses across the state.



2012 Vet Corps at orientation on the campus of Central Washington University

Our Vet Corps fosters a veteran community at the college or university so veterans can identify with their new “team.”

While they will be part of the answer in working with higher education to track and monitor the success of veterans on campuses, we will still need the help of higher education leaders to make an even greater impact in this area.

### ***... You're Hired!***

Let's face it. It's a tough job market. Just like government, businesses have downsized, streamlined, trimmed, done more with less (you get the idea!) and taken just about any action they could to turn a profit and keep the doors open.

For returning veterans who didn't have a job lined up, we told them not to worry. Along with WorkSource and the Military Department, we would help them to file for the unemployment benefits they'd earned. We worked on job searches and translating their military training and skills into terms a civilian employer would understand on a resume.

For some, the unemployment benefits were just enough to tide their families over until they finished school, or landed a job. For others, the multiple benefit extensions and lack of family wage jobs available meant they were out of work for up to 2 years... leaving them with a work history that many employers don't look kindly on.

With WorkSource, we identified veterans who were drawing unemployment benefits. Where possible, we connected them with VA benefits including education or training programs in high demand fields.

We also looked to our partners outside of state government. Groups such as Hire Americas Heroes, made up of some of Washington's largest businesses, came together and committed to hiring veterans. They held job fairs and have now moved toward hiring fairs, encouraging employers to hire veterans on the spot.

Washington's apprenticeship programs led the way in helping veterans meet the entry level requirements to become apprentices in the trades. Programs such as Veterans In Piping and HVAC have become models across the nation and have helped veterans start down an entirely new career path.

But, veterans employment is an area where we have much work to complete. We have begun a new campaign with Joint Base Lewis McChord and WorkSource to connect with newly separated veterans. The Federal Government has stepped up with the VOW Act, giving employers a tax credit for hiring veterans, and providing more vocational training to veterans who have used up their GI Bill benefits. And Governor Gregoire has directed state agencies to hire veterans and work together on identifying new ways to recruit and retain these highly trained individuals.

As we said before, we believe a job is the best benefit we can offer our veterans, and we'll continue working to connect veterans to jobs that will grow with their families.

## ***When Things Go Wrong...***

Despite the best of intentions, sometimes coming home after a military deployment isn't so easy for a young man or woman. Sometimes war trauma or physical injuries such as traumatic brain injury manifest in very destructive ways. Sadly, we've all seen the headlines where a veteran's Post Traumatic Stress or other conditions led to heavy drinking, car crashes, or even domestic violence.

This presented a new challenge to us, for a few different reasons.

The isolated bad-news stories had the potential to scare employers who become afraid their employee could snap. This would make it even harder for our veterans to find a job.

And the headlines scare veterans who avoid getting treatment because they don't want to be lumped into that very rare group.

Our behavioral health program took a proactive approach to creating outreach and training opportunities for a variety of professionals in communities throughout the state. Some of these trainings were provided in conjunction with the Department of Social and Health Services and some were provided through a contract with several veteran focused organizations.

We trained:

- First Responders, including law enforcement, mental health and crisis intervention
- K-12 Schools Administrators and Teachers
- College and University Administration and Faculty
- Tribal Leaders
- Other mental health providers

The training focused on what works when responding to a crisis involving a veteran and what resources were available to that veteran. The sessions also addressed issues of traumatic brain injury and veteran and military culture.

As a result, community providers took a more active role in identifying veterans and providing referrals to help their own veterans get the support and help they needed.

## *Struggling with one of Society's Challenging Issues...*

Sadly, as some of our military personnel came home, they found themselves homeless.

For some, extended deployments created financial hardships. Others found that the living arrangements they had before they deployed, perhaps living with mom and dad, didn't fit after a year or more in a combat zone.

Whatever the reasons, we believe that no Washington veteran should ever be homeless. Yet, in 2011, there were 2,043 homeless veterans in our state. This is a dramatic improvement from earlier years, but there is still more to be done to end homelessness for veterans.

In 2009, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki announced his goal to end veteran homelessness in five years.

We saw this as an opportunity to get out front and capitalize on the influx of federal funding that we anticipated would follow the bold announcement from Secretary Shinseki.

Again, we recognized that no one agency or organization could solve the issue of homelessness for veterans. With that knowledge, we focused on inspiring community providers to join forces and apply for federal homeless funding to serve veterans in their communities.

Our state has one of the nation's more active networks of public and private housing agencies. Entities participating in the creation of low-income housing for homeless and disabled individuals and families typically include local housing authorities, financial intermediaries and nonprofit housing providers in addition to the state Housing Trust Fund and the Washington State Housing Finance Commission.

In 2010, we convened the "Homeless Veterans Housing Summit – A Call for Action." Nearly 200 participants joined together to create a five-year veterans housing production plan and to position Washington providers to receive federal resources.

Following this statewide gathering, a series of regional summits were held to give communities strategies to help them serve the unique needs of veterans in every corner of our state.



The summits led to community partners applying for and receiving grant funds to provide housing services. For example, Catholic Community Services of Western Washington was selected to manage the Puget Sound Region's \$2 million Veteran's Homeless Prevention Program, a three-year effort launched in April 2011 to serve more than 350 recently separated veterans.

Through our partnership with Catholic Community Services, we provide on-site staff support to ensure veterans are connected with their benefits, including counseling, medical care and disability compensation. In the first five months of the program, 100 veterans were screened and 60 were housed using these grant funds.

While we provide services to homeless veterans, we know that preventing a veteran from becoming homeless in the first place is our best course of action. Again this is an area where we've accessed federal grants to help homeless veterans.

The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program serves veterans in both urban and rural areas of the state.

We use other resources to connect veterans with treatment and counseling services, case management and housing resources needed to ensure residential stability. This collaborative effort sets the path for homeless veterans to reintegrate in the labor force and obtain sustainable independent living.

In 2007, we also opened a Veterans Transitional Housing Program to capitalize on a federal grant and per diem program that offers residential stability for up to 60 homeless veterans. Veterans receive one-on-one case management and wrap-around supportive services. Since opening, 124 veterans have graduated and are sustaining themselves and their families in communities throughout Washington.

Ending homelessness among veterans remains a top priority and we will continue to increase awareness and encourage involvement from our partners in the community.

## ***Squeezing Out Every Drop of Efficiency...***

Our agency operates three long-term care facilities for veterans. These Veterans Homes offer a range of services and make up over 75% of our \$115 million biennial budget. When we as agencies were asked to take across the board cuts to our budgets, it naturally meant that our homes could be heavily impacted.

Early on, we made the decision that we did not want to make cuts to direct care staff. By whatever means possible, we would reduce expenditures and absorb reductions just about anywhere else.

Leaders and staff members were asked for ideas on how we could reduce our expenditures.

Ideas included using smaller juice glasses (not one of our more popular decisions), re-bidding therapy contracts and looking closely at the telecommunications and cable providers we contract with. We held positions vacant, significantly reduced travel and even went to a 4 day per week, 10 hour per day schedule in our central office to save on electricity.

But it wasn't nearly enough. So in addition to reducing expenditures, which we truly didn't have much flexibility on particularly at the Homes, we looked at increasing revenues.

Of our three Homes, only one was fully certified as both Medicaid and Medicare A&B. The other two homes were only Medicaid certified. Becoming Medicare A&B certified offered us the ability to bill for a significantly higher level of care. But it also required us to increase our staffing and gain additional expertise not only to provide a more complex level of care to our veterans, but also to successfully bill for the services we were providing.

Medicare certification was not only a good business decision, but also a good decision for our residents who find themselves in the hospital with a qualifying Medicare stay. Now they could return to the Veterans Home to receive their Medicare treatments, where in the past they had to be admitted to other community facilities during recovery and then transfer back to the Veterans Home.

Becoming Medicare certified was clearly the right decision for our Veterans Homes. Our homes now operate with a minimal General Fund State appropriation. (General Fund State dollars are still received, but they come in the form of Medicaid payments for our residents who are Medicaid eligible.)

***Capitalizing on a Good Idea,  
Even when it comes at a Bad Time...***

Our State Veterans Homes consistently operate between 95 and 100% full. So it's safe to say that there is a demand for State Veterans Home beds. We also provide some savings to the state by bringing in a Per Diem payment from the Federal VA that is only available to veterans living in State Veterans Homes.

So in 2008, when veteran leaders in Walla Walla approached us and asked whether we'd be interested in building a fourth State Veterans Home on the campus of the Federal VA Medical Center, it caused our eyebrows to cautiously go up!

We knew the timing was bad. It was after all still the beginning of the recession; there really was no end in sight. So asking the legislature for millions of dollars to build a nursing home wasn't a terribly popular idea.

But our partners in Walla Walla were persistent and in 2009, we were successful in receiving \$125,000 in the Capital Budget to conduct a pre-design for a new Veterans Home on the campus of the Jonathon M. Wainwright VA Medical Center in Walla Walla.

Following the pre-design, we asked for funds in 2010 to conduct the facility design. This time, our luck had run out. The legislature expressed little interest in an extremely tight capital budget for building a Veterans Home.

We re-grouped and worked on making the business case for a new State Veterans Home. The project would bring dozens of construction jobs to an area hard hit by the recession and bring nearly 100 permanent jobs to the area once it was fully operational.

In 2011, we enlisted the help of City leaders in Walla Walla and the veterans community and again approached the legislature with a request for \$2.4 million. This time, we were successful and set out to design a completely new style of Veterans Home.

With design nearly complete, the hardest part was yet to come. Even though a federal grant program will pay for 65% of the construction costs to build a State Veterans Home, we still needed to request from the legislature an additional \$14.4 million in 2012 to cover the state's 35% share of the construction.

We knew we had an uphill battle ahead of us, but we also knew we had an opportunity to receive over \$31 million in federal funding. During the 2012 Legislative Session, we successfully received the state match which allowed us to move forward and submit our application to the federal VA for the construction grant.

With a little luck, we'll be serving the long-term care needs of the veterans in Southeast Washington in 2014.

## *Creating New Programs in a Recession?*

For a decade, our veterans community asked how we could get the Federal VA to build a National Veterans Cemetery in eastern Washington. The Tahoma National Cemetery, located in Kent, was the only Veterans Cemetery in the state, and our veterans felt this inequity needed to be resolved, recession or not.

Unfortunately, eastern Washington simply didn't have enough veterans to merit the construction of a National Cemetery.

But there was a ray of hope. The Federal VA had a State Cemetery Grant Program. States could build veteran cemeteries, even in areas with lower concentrations of veterans, and the federal government would pay 100% of the construction and equipment costs.

The catch... the state had to fund all operational costs in perpetuity.

So, in the middle of a recession, all we needed was the funding stream to pay for ongoing operational costs.

We all knew that asking the legislature for \$350,000 per year was out of the question, but the veterans community didn't let us off the hook that easily!

Again, in spite of the recession, the cemetery wasn't the only thing veterans were asking for. A veteran license plate had long been the topic of debate in our state legislature, but for years, the legislature kept a moratorium on the creation of any new vanity plates. That was until 2005...!

With the end of the vanity plate moratorium, WDVA and the veterans community set about creating a series of six Armed Forces License Plates. We had much to accomplish in a short time.



Wreaths Across America, Dec.  
2011



Veterans showing off their new License Plates!

To bring the proposal to the legislature, 2,000 signatures were needed for each plate. That meant 12,000 signatures to even run a bill!

We also needed a plan for how any funds raised through the sale of the plates would be spent.

Which brings us back to the State Veterans Cemetery.

We, along with our veteran leaders, quickly agreed that the revenue from the sale of Armed Forces License Plates would fund the State Veterans Cemetery.

The rest, as they say, is history!

In 2006, Armed Forces License Plates went on sale.

In 2010 we opened Washington's First State Veterans Cemetery.



Dedication Ceremony on Memorial Day, 2010

Creativity, flexibility, and out of the box thinking allowed us to fulfill an unmet need for our veterans, and further our vision of *Honoring Veterans in Their Final Resting Place*.

### *Final Thoughts from John Lee...*

As I contemplate the dedication of this administration, our many partners, and our wonderful WDVA staff, I am mindful of the predictable aftermath of the wars against terrorism and the tens of thousands of Washington Citizens who have honorably served.

It is important to consider what this state will do and the role of WDVA when the wars are over; when the yellow ribbons have faded and the attention to the casualty reports and funerals for the fallen are no longer in the forefront of the media. How will we sustain the good work of our country and this state in our collective efforts to “Serve Those Who Served”?

I cannot thank the Governor enough for the privilege to lead this incredible agency during such a pivotal time in our history and for the opportunity to represent the growing veteran population in our state and their families.

I also want to commend my good friend Mike Gregoire, who we fondly call First Mike, for his tireless dedication to the cause of honoring the men and women of our military and those who have so honorably served this great country.

Mike has been stalwart in his role as the Governor’s veterans’ representative and his state and national influence are immeasurable. The many hours we spent together, the many places he has visited to engage with veterans and their families, and the time he has devoted to recognizing those who have served has left an indelible mark of appreciation on our citizens.



First Mike shakes hands with veterans following a Veterans Ceremony.

In my humble opinion, the new administration and leadership of WDVA must plan for and consider the following:

1. How will we meet the long term care needs of our aging veteran population? It is estimated that the need for care will far exceed the capacity we currently have.
2. Anticipating continuing budget challenges, how will WDVA maintain this program structure that has yielded so much success?
3. While we have a significant presence at JBLM and are critically involved in the transition of our soldiers, how will we muster the resources to invest in the various Navy and Air Force installations that are so critical to our state?
4. Should WDVA pursue federal funding for a second Veterans Cemetery in eastern Washington?
5. Will WDVA achieve the goal of ending homelessness among veterans by 2015?
6. What will be the continued role of WDVA in serving the behavioral health needs of our veterans and their families and what must the state do beyond the federal government relative to Traumatic Brain Injury?

Unlike the majority of other states, our veteran population continues to grow. Our requirements and need for services will not diminish.

Predictably they will increase with the anticipated downsizing of our military force and the attractive place the State of Washington is to live not only during a military career but for years after in retirement.

Let us continue our focus, accountability, pursuit of federal funding, legislative support, and good will toward those who have so valiantly protected the freedoms we enjoy.